

Psalm of Ascent

Part 6 – A Mighty Fortress

Psalm 125

The hills surrounding Jerusalem and the walls of the city are in view as the Psalmist reflects on the security of God's people. There is a meaning in these impressive sights which transcend the city and its hills. As the pilgrims approached the holy city they were to reflect on the security that was theirs by virtue of the Lord's protection. God surrounds his people just as surely as Jerusalem is surrounded by hills and a mighty wall. And this security is no temporary arrangement but a promise applied "from this time forth and forevermore."



The Golden Gate in Jerusalem

Verse three may be misunderstood as a promise that God's people will be untouched by evil. Of course we know this is not the case. Not only does our experience tell us that we are touched by evil but the Bible makes clear that this is the reality in a fallen world. The key word in verse three is "rest." The "scepter" or rule of the wicked will not finally rest upon God's people in such a way that they will have no choice but "to stretch out their hand and do wrong" (vs. 3). God's people would suffer for generations under the rule of wicked kings. This situation would only worsen once the kingdom was divided between Israel and Judah.

But while the kings of Israel and Judah went from bad to worse God preserved his people. In his grace the Lord protected the righteous line which would eventually lead to the birth of the Messiah and the inauguration of his church, "the Israel of God" (Galatians 6:16). So the words of Psalm 125 find their fulfillment in God's new covenant people. All those who trust in the Lord no matter where they are from or what they have done will be kept secure. God is the fortress for his people and they will never be forsaken.

Main Idea: Those who trust in God are secure and will be preserved no matter how great the testing.

1. Trust in God because He is your Protector

Vv. 1-3

- The word translated "trust" is a strong word which means to "find security, feel secure or confident, or to rely on something" (Ross, 654). In this sense trust has strong relational implications. Certainly it involves believing the revealed facts about God. But trust is also experiential to the extent that how we live is directly impacted by what we believe about God.
- Mt. Zion was the hill within the walled city upon which David set the tabernacle and where the temple was later built. It was the place of the Lord's special presence among his people. As the pilgrims beheld the city with its protective walls and surrounding hills they would have been impressed by the security of the city. The Psalmist draws upon this image of safety and security to describe the state of those who trust in the Lord.
- Vs. 3 – The Lord's protection is directly applied to the reality of wicked leadership. This Psalm was written either in reference to the wicked kings of Israel and Judah or the foreign powers which held them captive (Babylon / Assyria). As a nation's leader goes so go its people. The

people of Israel and Judah very often began practicing the wickedness of their ungodly kings. But the promise here is that God will preserve those who trust in him. He will protect them from falling away. Even though they are tested severely at times the Lord will preserve his elect from apostasy.

- *Proverbs 18:10* – “The name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous man runs into it and is safe.”
- *Psalms 27:7* – “The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.”
- *Psalms 63:1* – “You have been my refuge, a strong tower against the enemy.”

2. Trust in God because He is your Judge

Vv. 4-5b

- This should not be read as a formula for legalistic righteousness. The Psalmist is not suggesting that God owes blessing to those who do the required number of good deeds. Neither is he suggesting that the Lord saves people who “are good” on the basis of their own goodness. Rather the prayer of verse 4 is a straight forward recognition that there is a fundamental difference between those who trust in the Lord and those who practice wickedness. Those who trust in the Lord will be those whose lives are noticeably distinct from those who do not trust in the Lord. The prayer of verse 4 is simply a reflection of the many of promises God has made to do good to those who trust in him.
- The contrast of the Lord’s treatment of those who turn away from him and join the “evildoers” will be led away to destruction (vs. 5). The Lord’s judgment is always right. He will never go back on his word and lead away to destruction those who trust in him. This is a warning specific to those who claim to be part of God’s covenant community but who follow in the ways of the wicked.
- This is a warning to all who bear the outward marks of the covenant people of God but continue in their sin. It is also a plea to trust in God because he is our Judge.
- *1 Peter 2:6* – “The one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.”

3. Trust in God because He is your Peace

Vs. 5c – “Peace be upon Israel!”

- This was a blessing not upon every individual who claimed membership in the covenant community. Given the context it seems clear that this is a benediction upon those who, even though tested, remain faithful to the Lord rather than turning way to evil. There is no peace for those who practice wickedness.
- This final peace will be experienced at the day of judgement when the Lord will lead away the wicked. God’s final judgment exercised through the returning Christ is an essential part of the new creation. The final and ultimate peace of salvation will not be complete until the unrepentant are judged and led away to destruction.
- Here, Israel should not be understood as ethnic or national Israel but typologically. Ethnic Israel was the “type” pointing to the worldwide church consisting of all those Jews and Gentiles from every nation who hear and believe the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- *Galatians 6:14-16* – “But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon **the Israel of God.**”